

## New Fiction in Varied Forms

## This Freedom"

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woman. Women can't come back. They take to a thing and it becomes a craze, it becomes an obsession, it becomes a drug. They take to a thing—anything; a poison like mine, or a pursuit like some one else's or an idea like some other's or a career in life, like yours, Rosalie—they take to it and go deep enough, and they're its; they never, never will be able to come out of it. . . . Men have hobbies. They don't have attachments; they have detachments. They detach themselves and turn to a thing, and they detach themselves from it and turn back again. Women don't turn to a thing; they go to it. They don't have hobbies, they have obsessions. They cannot slip, they drain. It's in their bone. For a woman there is no comeback. They don't issue return tickets to women. For women there is only departure; there is no return."

We now reach the event which well nigh shattered Rosalie's self-made philosophy of life. Up to now it had been so easy to take a man's part in a man's world, admitting that men's ways were the better ways, even though men themselves—all men—were beasts, tame cats, tabby cats, wild cats and the rest of it. She refused to remember that last despairing cry of Sister Anna which had haunted her childhood: "O God, Thou knowest how hard it is for women." But presently she meets Harry Ocleve, whom at first she scorns because he is the "good catch" that Aunt Belle has carefully picked out for Rosalie's "painful cousin," Laetitia. And then, all of a sudden, she and Harry forget Aunt Belle and Laetitia and the rest of the universe in the joy of having discovered each other. "There can be no love like love suddenly leapt from repression into being."

Rosalie, that had abhorred the very name of love, now finding love was quite consumed by love. She loved him so! . . . She looked at him with eyes, not of an inexperienced girl blinded by love, but of one cynically familiar with the traits of common man, intolerantly prejudiced, sharply susceptible to every note or motion of displeasing quality; and her eyes told her heart, and what is much more, told her mind, that nothing but sheer perfection was here. When they were married what she continued to find was simply that he was perfect.

In point of fact Harry Ocleve comes as near being a colorless personage as any character in the volume. His perfection, so far as a mere outsider is concerned, lies chiefly in a sheeplike acceptance of Rosalie's ideas, and a slavish adherence to the conditions laid down by Rosalie in their private marriage contract, even when he sees the fabric of the home he dreamed of turning to an impalpable mirage. One fancies that Mr. Hutchinson meant to make him colorless, sheeplike, futile. One of the penalties of a coming generation of Rosalies is to be a host of Harry Ocleves, perfect in their docility and non-resistance.

For a time, however, everything seems to go unexpectedly well. From the start it is understood that their marriage is to be an equal partnership, Rosalie living her life, Harry living his; and together, when they want to, when they are off duty, so to speak, they will live their life, the life they mutually share. They theorize delightfully over marriage, like children over a new toy. Marriage should be a perfect fitting together, a perfect joining of two perfect halves. They both agree in "hating the old dependence notion"; all the privileges the man's, the woman's all the duties. Their chosen slogan is "equal in work and in responsibility, and therefore equal in place, in privilege, in freedom."

## III.

The years slip by swiftly. Simcox is dead; and Rosalie is with Field's, with a department of her own splendidly organized—for Rosalie's forte is organization. So is her home splendidly organized. It runs itself; indeed it has to, so seldom is she there. There are three children now, Hugo, Doda and Benji, baby names reminiscent of the weeks she perforce grudgingly gave from Lombard street. Those children are being brought up with every modern advantage. In the early years they were cared for by Muffett, who was "everything that a nurse ought to be"; and later they were given over to Miss Prescott, who was a chil-

dren's governess, "not for the old and fatuous reason that she loved children," but for the new and intelligent reason that she was attracted by the child mind as a study," and was certificated in what she called Child Welfare.

"Everything troublesome in regard to the children was left to Miss Prescott. Their mother only enjoyed her children, presented to her fresh, clean and happy for the purpose of her enjoyment; and the children only enjoyed their mother, visiting them smiling, devoted, unworried, for the purpose of their happiness. It was a perfect and a mutually beneficial arrangement. . . . Children, she held, ought not to see their parents bad tempered or distressed or in any way out of control. It is harmful for children to come in contact with the unpleasant things of life. She looked back upon her own childhood and reflected how very different it was. Why, she could remember time and again when her dear mother, hunted by her cares, was broken down and crying. She would go to her and cry to see her crying, and her mother would hug her to her breast and declare she was her 'little comfort.' Was it good for a child to suffer scenes like these? Her Hugo, her Doda and her Benji never saw her anything but radiant; and because that was so she never saw them cry, either on her account or on their own."

The first thing approaching a clash comes when Harry and Rosalie in their respective life work are both offered big opportunities that will entail absence from England for many months. Harry, for business reasons, rejects the offer; to his amazement Rosalie decides to accept. "Rosalie," he tells her, "let's keep the thing square. A man can leave his home; he often has to. I think not so a woman; not a mother; not as you wish now to leave it. It can't, without her, go on—not in the same way." But Rosalie insists that her home, their home, is different. She has proved that a woman can stand upright and yet be wife, be mother and make home. And when Harry retorts "That you stand upright does not discharge you from responsibilities," her answer is ready: "Dear, nor all my responsibilities discharge me from my privileges."

As so often in life, a little incident out of a clear sky jars Rosalie out of her complacency, unsettles all her plans. One evening Harry is questioning Hugo about his studies at school: "Come, they give you plenty of Scripture?"

"Oh, don't they just! Tons and tons! But don't ask Scripture, father. What's the use of learning all that stuff about the Flood, about the Ark, about the Israelites, about Daniel, about all that stuff? What's the use? It's all rot. You know it isn't true."

Time flashed his blade and struck her terribly. She called out dreadfully, "Hugo!"

"Mother, you know it's all made up!"

She cried out in a girl's voice and with a girl's impulsive gesture of her arm across the table: "It isn't! It isn't!"

Her voice, her gesture, the look upon her face could not but startle him. He was red, rather frightened. He said mumbly: "Well, mother, you never taught me any different."

The immediate sequel to the shock of Hugo's words is that Rosalie comes home. Miss Prescott with her modern methods is dismissed, and Rosalie makes an honest but belated effort to play the old fashioned role of mother and instill the sort of teaching she herself had received in the old rectory days. The only trouble was that the new resolve came too late. The wrong foundation had been laid; the children failed to respond, and, worst of all, Keggo was right—she had given herself to a career and there was no comeback for a woman. Field's kept calling for her with the persistency of an obsession—and before long Field's had her back.

One really has not the heart to analyze this story to its poignant end. The cumulative tragedy is so clearly foreshadowed, and the specific details make relatively so little difference. Of course it is this part of the volume with which fault-finders will most readily quarrel; and perhaps, reasoning from cause to effect, it was not inevitable that such a mounting wave of felony, dishonor and death should have overwhelmed the family almost in the selfsame hour. But time and space are the prerogative of the author and it matters little

whether the mills of the gods grind slowly or (as Rosalie told herself) as it happened in the Book of Job, "Wrath on wrath, visitation upon visitation, judgment upon judgment." It is enough that we are made to feel that she reaped as she sowed. Hugo sums the case up with ruthless fullness:

"It's not I that's ruined my life. It's you. What sort of a chance have I ever had? What sort of a home have I ever had? Have I ever had a mother? I can't ever remember a time when I wasn't in the charge of some servant or governess or other. You said this afternoon before father that I didn't love you. Did you ever teach me to love you? By God, I can't remember it. By God, I can't."

There are few novels in which the characters so grip the reader's heartstrings that, knowing they are headed toward disaster, he comes to dread the turn of each page, fearing what will meet his eye. To have achieved precisely this effect constitutes one of the chief claims of "This Freedom" to an enduring place among the novels of real importance.

ON TIPTOE: A ROMANCE OF THE REDWOODS. By Stewart Edward White. New York: George H. Doran Co.

THIS new volume, Mr. White whimsically assures us, is "a swashbuckling story of pirate days. It has as leading characters the Buccaneer and his sinister Second in Command, the Fair Damsel in Distress, the Bright Shining Hero and those great Intelligences by whose caprice—or by whose ordered law—our tiny world carries on among its millions of sister worlds." In point of fact those pirate days are the days we live in; the Pirate Chief is one Grimstead, hard fisted, unscrupulous, highly successful promoter; the Second in Command is young Gardiner, "part keeper of the loot and principal adviser of strategy," whom Grimstead would welcome as a son-in-law, and the Damsel in Distress is his daughter Burton, who resents her father's clumsy matchmaking and sulks methodically. We first meet the party in the heart of the California redwoods, where Grimstead's latest craft, an opulent touring car, is hard and fast aground, and his gasoline tank has sprung a hopeless leak. Darkness is descending; they are stranded for the night, and no one, not even the English butler, Simmins, knows the first rudiments of woodcraft. Suddenly out of the nowhere comes Davenport, the Bright Shining Hero, in an absurd car with a tinny rattle but moving mysteriously with noiseless engine. Davenport makes camp, pitches tents, prepares supper—and incidentally takes the Damsel in Distress by storm.

Now, it would be distinctly unfair to imply that this diverting comedy is either real or burlesque melodrama. It is a genial potpourri of many moods and matters; of science and metaphysics, trout fishing and mountain climbing, frenzied finance and strenuous love making. Its central plot, based on Davenport's invention of a marvelous storage battery of negligible weight, which gathers electricity from the circumambient air and practically solves the problem of perpetual motion, remains, despite the clever and plausible exposition, distinctly artificial and unconvincing; and the author is foredoomed to abolish, annihilate it before the close of the chapter, in some way equally unconvincing and artificial. Of course, Grimstead, being the pirate that he is, regards Davenport's perpetual motion battery as legitimate plunder and proceeds to get control of it by a tricky contract such as none can draw better than Gardiner. But the great Intelligences, on whom pirates fail to count, have willed otherwise and ruin a project to corner the motive power of the world through the instrumentality of a sulky, revengeful little dog that bites a wrist that guides a steering wheel.

But, after all, it is not Grimstead's greed or Gardiner's eagerness to ruin a successful rival that hold us to this book. These things have been and always will be the stock properties of the whole clan of story tellers. What makes "On Tiptoe," in common with many another volume by the same author, pleasantly memorable, is its background of great open spaces and towering trees—which you know to be spacious and towering not just because he tells you so but because he makes you

see and hear and breathe it all in for yourself so palpably, so intensely that the noisy street life just outside your own window is infinitely remote and forgotten. Yes, and not only the background but the rich and never failing comedy of human nature, and of dog nature, too, for that matter; and it is often the secondary personages in his stories with which Mr. White himself seems to have the most quiet fun and of which he most successfully passes on the contagion. In the present story, for instance, one feels that Grimstead and Gardiner, even Davenport and Burton, are stock characters. The author feels it, too, and gently burlesques them in his opening pages. But take Simmins, the English butler, whose natural instinct was to go hilariously rollicking through life and whose fate has been to play his solemn, correct, terrifically imposing part until it becomes second nature to him. But here we have Simmins transplanted to a sphere where butlers are a misfit; and the two people to whom he gives his Cockney heart, Burton and Davenport, both refuse to take his solemn pomposity seriously, but urge him, singly and together, to "be human." His natural instinct and his lifelong training are at war; and with Burton and Davenport throwing in their weight we have the delightful and unforgettable spectacle of the slow and at times surprising unbending of Simmins. We really begin to have hopes for Simmins when he answers Davenport's cheerful "Hallo, Simmins!" with a sportive "Toodleyou!"

And then, too, there are Rapsallion, the solemn, fuzzy Irish terrier, who on his first appearance each morning always took such pains "not to look like a dog that had slept in a bed," and Punketty-Snivvles, Burton's pet Pomeranian, insufferable atom of canine snobbery, who just once got thoroughly and deservedly cuffed and, backing into the remotest corner, "gazed small malevolence at a ruined world."

CALVIN WINTER.

ONE THING IS CERTAIN. By Sophie Kerr. George H. Doran Company

THIS novel shows a dramatic force and fire that should place Sophie Kerr at a much higher rank than she has hitherto reached among the more important American women novelists, especially as the thing is always kept well in hand. It has dignity as well as strength, and although the climax is so unusual that it will no doubt shock some readers, it is justified and entirely successful. One must go to the Oedipus for a dramatic situation in any way comparable, but she manages to make a conclusion that might almost be said to be inherently hopelessly revolting into a tragically beautiful thing. It would hardly be fair to the book, however, to give a full resume of the plot—at least of the last scenes—since the element of surprise is important to the effect.

It is a grim, unrelenting story, delving deeply into elemental emotions, ruthlessly laying bare the sufferings of the chief character, and giving one of the most faithfully hideous analyses of certain types of sensual Puritanism and hard, narrow religious fanaticism that has ever been shown in fiction. John Henry Hyde, the husband of the unhappy Louellen, is unqualifiedly a monster, but unfortunately he is only too real. Perhaps his type was commoner a few generations ago than it is to-day, but he is a continuing element in an imperfectly evolved human system; cruel as only a religious bigot can be cruel, avaricious, mean in small things as well as in great ones, and utterly bestial in his sensuality beneath the outer respectability and sanctimoniousness of a Methodist deacon. He has practically no redeeming trait, yet one can not say that he is at all overdrawn or in any way a caricature. It is possible for the intelligent human animal to be as vile as that.

It should be noted at the outset that although the book is frank to a point that would have been held impossible a few years ago, and does not mince matters or evade facts, however brutal, when it is necessary to display them, it is even austere in manner. It is psychic surgery but always antiseptically clean. It does not indulge in innuendo, and has no slightest taint of morbidity in its conception. It holds nothing for the prurient or salacious reader, though it would not be surprising if

it should attract attacks by the modern John Henrys of criticism.

It also has unusual values as a picture of a bygone day, an era that is for the most part closed though in actual time less than half a century behind us: the still simple agricultural existence of the old settled peoples of the Eastern Shore of Maryland, with their camp meetings, their rather old fashioned negroes, and the "tournament" wherein the local "Knights" ride furiously to pick rings from a post—a survival of even more primitive days—and the thin, bitter religiosity of the churches, contrasted with the hard riding, boisterous, drunken outbreaks of the rustic blades. The coming of the cheap automobile and other economic changes have greatly altered even that remote corner to-day. It is a good thing to have its local color preserved as in this book.

The story falls into two parts, with an interval of seventeen years between them. It begins at about the '80's and ends toward the close of the century, but its background reaches to the days just after the civil war. The first part is concerned with the love affairs of Louellen West and Mart Bladen, and their ghastly termination in her marriage to John Henry Hyde. Mart is a fine, upstanding young man, a bit "wild" and reckless, but lovable. Louellen loves him, but is afraid of his wildness. She puts him on probation for three months, but he relapses, gets drunk and is one of a party of rolsters who ride roughshod into the camp meeting to break it up. In her despair of him, and feeling that he does not love her enough to behave for her sake, she recklessly agrees to marry John Henry Hyde, who is her father's choice. But even before the wedding she begins to realize the mistake and tries to escape at the last moment, but circumstances are too much for her.

"A marriage in which the woman is unwilling," says the story, "is not a marriage, but a bondage. Nor is it a bondage that lightens with time and habitude; rather it darkens with hate, deepens with bitterness, is shot through with pangs of swift and terrible loathing. The woman who must live in such a bondage must either break or harden." The rest of the first part of the book is a record of Louellen's reaction to her husband's bestiality. She bears him two children, but when the second is a small baby she reaches a breaking point and runs away to her old lover, Mart, who owns the adjoining farm. But, with the dawn comes realization that she cannot face it out, nor can she abandon her children, so she goes back. Thereafter, however, she gains some independence and "buys herself" by letting her husband have all the property that has come to her.

John Henry accepts the situation, and bides his time for revenge, saying nothing because of his fear of publicity which would wreck his own high standing in the church and the community. Louellen's third child, Judy, naturally becomes the chief target of John Henry's revenge, as he knows that she is not his.

The second part of the story shows history repeating itself, with Judy, now nearly seventeen, in Louellen's former place. John Henry tries to force her into a degrading marriage with a vile young man, as the consummation of his revenge. How Mart finally saves her must be left for the reader to find out from the book.

All the characters are excellently drawn. The writer escapes the danger of making Mart too "noble" or of idealizing the situation too much at any point. The gradual hardening and decaying of Louellen under the strain is shown with subtlety and fine insight. The minor characters are not neglected; each is carefully finished, but kept in his or her proper place.

It is possible to quarrel with the denouement as too hazy to be quite plausible, but it is really logical enough under the circumstances. The book is likely to attract unusual attention, for various reasons, but it can stand it.

GEORGE WOOD.

SPELLBINDERS. By Margaret Cullin Banning. George H. Doran Company.

THIS is an acutely intelligent study of the modern woman in politics. If one asks whether she ought to be there,

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